THE SHEEP FEUD

(Calgary Herald, June 17, 1939) By Betty Crook

Nowadays most people get their ideas of "feudin'" from the movies or from reading western thrillers, but there are still many residents of the Brooks area who actually remember how a first-class feud was carried on in their midst for nearly a year.

About twenty years ago, much of the land north of Brooks was open range, used by the comparatively few settlers as grazing area for their horses and cattle. Sheep were taboo in the country, and might have remained so if the price of wool and mutton had not induced sheepmen to increase their herds and also their territory. Large flocks of woolies drifted across the Montana boundary and ranged further and further north until they reached the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company in the vicinity of Brooks.

Cattlemen saw the invasion coming and tried to get the C.P.R. and the Alberta government to restrict the range for sheep, but they got no action so they themselves set the railway track as the boundary line.

Of course the grass looked greener on the other side, and several herdsmen moved their flocks across. Warnings were issued, "Move back, or else...", but the sheepherders paid no heed.

Cattlemen then took the law into their own hands, organized secret meetings and set a day for the purge. They came sixty strong from all over the district. Cowboys brought their entire "string" along as mounts for storekeepers and farm laborers. Town loafers joined in, just for the fun of

the thing, and took some "likker" along to enliven the outing.

At a signal they were off, amid whoops and shouts, and a few shots from guns carried for effect rather than use. Each group of riders headed for a certain band of sheep, and went at their task with such a will that by night not a single sheep or herder remained north of the tracks, and the only evidence of the intrusion was the smoking ashes of the hurriedly abandoned sheep camps.

A couple of arrests were made, but nothing came of them.

That fall sheep owners were greatly in need of feed and bought large quantities at high prices from their former enemies. This trade for their mutual good, the gradual fencing of the range and the sharp drop in the price of wool and mutton tended to heal the breach between the sheepmen and the cattlemen.

Now sheep raising is an important phase of agriculture in this district and among its leading advocates are some of those very men who once rode southward to take part in the short, but furious, sheep war.